

25. (Amended) The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further
a.g. including means for automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status
update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is
detected.

REMARKS

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejects claims 1-25 under §103 over the combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg. Applicant respectfully traverses the rejections.

For amendments, claim 9 has been canceled; claims 1, 4, 7-8, 10, 13, 16-17, 19, 22, and 25 have been amended to more clearly point out the claimed invention (and correct some minor typographical errors, including in claims 1 and 19); and claim 23 has been amended to correct a minor typographical error.

Applicant's claimed invention facilitates electronic communications between groups of individuals sharing a common interest or affiliation (an "affinity" group), by providing a method and apparatus in which each member of the affinity group may send/receive status updates to/from each of the other members of the affinity group. Hence, when any member undergoes a change in status, each of the other members of the affinity group receives the status update, and stores the status update in a personal communications device. That way, one member of the affinity group can readily access the status of the other members of the affinity group at his/her personal communications device without having to request the information from the network each time. Note that the claimed methods are directed are reciprocal (i.e., multidirectional), not "master-slave" type methods. That is, the transmission and receipt of status updates are not strictly limited to unidirectional communications from a single "master" to one or more "slaves," but instead the communication of status updates occurs bilaterally between all members of the affinity group, allowing each member of the group to track the status of any other member in the group.

Claims 1-8

The language of claim 1 has been amended to clarify this reciprocal flow of the status updates according to the invention, and now explicitly requires “storing, in each individual member’s communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group...when the status of any member...changes, sending a status update message...to said each other member... receiving said status update messages concerning each other member...at said each other member’s...device [and] updating said status information in said each other member’s...device when said status update message concerning said any member is received.”

The Examiner has erred in citing the combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg in support of the rejection, because neither Borgstahl nor Rosenberg disclose the reciprocity of Applicant’s claim 1. In contrast, the method disclosed by Borgstahl and Rosenberg is, at best, a “master-slave” method. For instance, Borgstahl discloses the unidirectional communication of status from a first individual to a second individual only. In Borgstahl, a subscriber (i.e. “slave”) must subscribe to a publisher (i.e. “master”) in order to receive status update messages provided by the publisher. Furthermore, the subscriber will only receive status updates with respect to the publisher, and not those of any of the other members in the group. Thus, subscriber A receives status updates from publisher B; however, publisher B is completely ignorant of any change in the status of subscriber A. There is simply no disclosure in Borgstahl of any reciprocity; all status updates are only from the master to the slave, never the other way around. The failure of Borgstahl to reciprocate the status changes becomes even more clear upon extending the concept of Borgstahl to a group consisting of three members, subscribers A and B who subscribe to a publisher C. In this scenario, subscribers A and B only receive status updates from publisher C. However, subscribers A and B are completely ignorant of each other’s status, and publisher C is equally as ignorant of the status of both A and B, even though they belong to

the same group. Contrast this to the claim method where A would be notified of status changes for both B and C; B would be notified of status changes for both A and C; and C would be notified of status changes for both A and B. In short, the method disclosed by Borgstahl is unidirectional, and teaches communicating an individual's status without reciprocating any information to any other individuals in the group. In light of the above, Borgstahl fails to teach or suggest Applicant's claim 1. A similar analysis applies with respect to Rosenberg. Accordingly, claim 1 defines patentable subject matter over the cited art. Applicant therefore respectfully requests the allowance of claim 1, and its dependent claims 2-8.

Claims 10-18

The Examiner has also rejected claim 10, citing similar reasoning as in the rejection of claim 1. Applicant has amended claim 10 to more clearly point out the reciprocal flow of the status updates according to the invention. For the reasons similar to those stated above with respect to claim 1, the cited art fails to teach or suggest the subject matter of Applicant's claim 10. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that claim 10 defines patentable subject matter over the cited art. Applicant therefore respectfully requests the allowance of claim 10, and its dependent claims 11-18.

Claims 19-25

The Examiner has also rejected claim 19, citing similar reasoning as in the rejection of claim 1. Claim 19 is directed to an apparatus for performing the methods described above and has been amended to more clearly point out the reciprocal flow of the status updates according to the invention. For reasons similar to those stated above with respect to claim 1, the cited art fails to teach or suggest the subject matter of Applicant's claim 19. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that claim 19 defines patentable subject matter over the cited art. Applicant therefore respectfully requests the allowance of claim 19, and its dependent claims 20-25.

Respectfully submitted,
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11 OCT 2002

VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

1. (Amended) A communication method implemented in a communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
- b. storing, in [an individual's members] each individual members' communication device, status information concerning [other members] each other member of said affinity group;
- c. when the status of [a one] any member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to [the] said each other [members] member of said affinity group;
- d. receiving said status update messages concerning [other members] each other member of said affinity group at said each other member's communication device; and
- e. updating said status information in said [individual] each other member's communication device when a status update message concerning [another] said any member is received.

4. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 2 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to [other members] each other member of the affinity group.

7. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 1 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.

8. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 7 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message to said each other member of said affinity group when a change in status is detected.

10. (Amended) A communication method implemented in a mobile communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
- b. storing member status information data in each mobile communication [devices] device used by said members;
- c. sending a first status update message from a first member's communication device to a centralized server when said first member's status changes;
- d. forwarding said first status update message from said server to each other member of said affinity group, including a second member of said affinity group;
- [d]e. receiving said status update message at said second member's mobile communication device[;] and [e.] updating said status information in said second member's mobile communication device when said status update message is received;
- f. sending a second status update message from said second member's communication device to said centralized server when said second member's status changes;
- g. forwarding said second status update message from said server to each other member of said affinity group, including said first member of said affinity group;
- h. receiving said status update message at said first member's mobile communication device and updating said status information in said first member's mobile communication device when said second status update message is received.

13. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 11 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to each other members of the affinity group.

16. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 10 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.

17. (Amended) The communication method according to claim 16 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message to said affinity group when a change in status is detected.

19. (Amended) A mobile communication device for allowing a member of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said mobile communication device comprising:

- a. a memory for storing member status information data;
- b. a transmitter [responsive] for transmitting status update messages to other members of said affinity group when said member's status changes;
- c. a receiver for receiving status update messages from other members of said affinity group;
- d. a processor operatively connected to said memory for writing status information to and reading status information from said memory, said processor being programmed to:
 1. generate a status update message when said member's status changes for transmission by said transmitter to [other members] each other member of said affinity group; and
 2. update said status information stored in said memory when a status update message is received from another member of said affinity group.

22. (Amended) The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for selecting the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to [other members] each other member of the affinity group.

23. (Amended) The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for designating a period during which status updates are enabled.

25. (Amended) The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.